



Continuous Living Cover:  
Report on Training  
& Educational Opportunities  
in Minnesota and Iowa  
2010 – April 2013

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Green Lands Blue Waters has developed a Continuous Living Cover Events Database to track field days, workshops, and other educational events that deliver information directly to farmers about options and implementation of Continuous Living Cover practices. The Database will be a continual work in progress; we intend to seek out additional information on past events and also add new listings on a monthly basis.

Goals of the Continuous Living Cover Events Database include:

- Develop a record of events for tracking changes in the availability of training opportunities that promote Continuous Living Cover on the landscape.
- Produce a tool for Green Lands Blue Waters colleagues to use in their own workshop planning. Each event record includes information about collaborating organizations, agencies, and businesses; contact information for the event organizers; and a brief description of the event. Where information about featured speakers was available we included that as well.
- Foster collaboration among organizations. Database users can sort data to find out which organizations are most active in each CLC strategy, and what types of events they typically sponsor.

Data sources:

Data for this first-phase effort were taken from sources readily accessible online or through contacts with our partner organizations. Organizations that put significant resources into maintaining calendars and catalogs of events include: the Leopold Center at Iowa State University, Practical Farmers of Iowa, Land Stewardship Project, and the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture at the University of Minnesota. Green Lands Blue Waters is exploring contacts with other groups to request information about their field day and workshop offerings. The online data sources were most readily available and the record was the most complete for Minnesota and Iowa, so this report will focus primarily on those two states.

- Leopold Center calendar, begun September 2011.
- Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture calendar, begun July 2010.
- Land Stewardship Project calendar, begun August 2012 (but events were posted on MISA calendar prior to Aug. 2012).
- Practical Farmers of Iowa Field Days Catalog, 2011 and 2012.
- Practical Farmers of Iowa brochures and press releases.
- Northeast Iowa Graziers brochures.
- Personal communication; Agricultural Watersheds Institute, Rural Advantage and Land Stewardship Project.

Database description:

This database contains records of field days, pasture walks, workshops, conferences and webinars that meet the following criteria:

- 1) Relevant to at least one of the five Continuous Living Cover strategies promoted by Green Lands Blue Waters (<http://greenlandsbluewaters.net/strategies/clc>): agroforestry, biomass, cover crops, perennial forages, perennial grains; cropping systems that incorporate one or more of those strategies; or placement of CLC crops on the landscape.
- 2) Took place in Iowa, Illinois, Minnesota, or Wisconsin from the start of 2010 through present.
- 3) Had farmers as the primary audience; or at minimum were accessible to farmers and provided information on farm-level implementation of practices.
- 4) Presented techniques or information relevant to implementation of Continuous Living Cover at a field scale. (Events dealing with yards, gardens, small-scale orchards or vineyards, or small-holdings were not included in this database.)

Summaries of Database information:

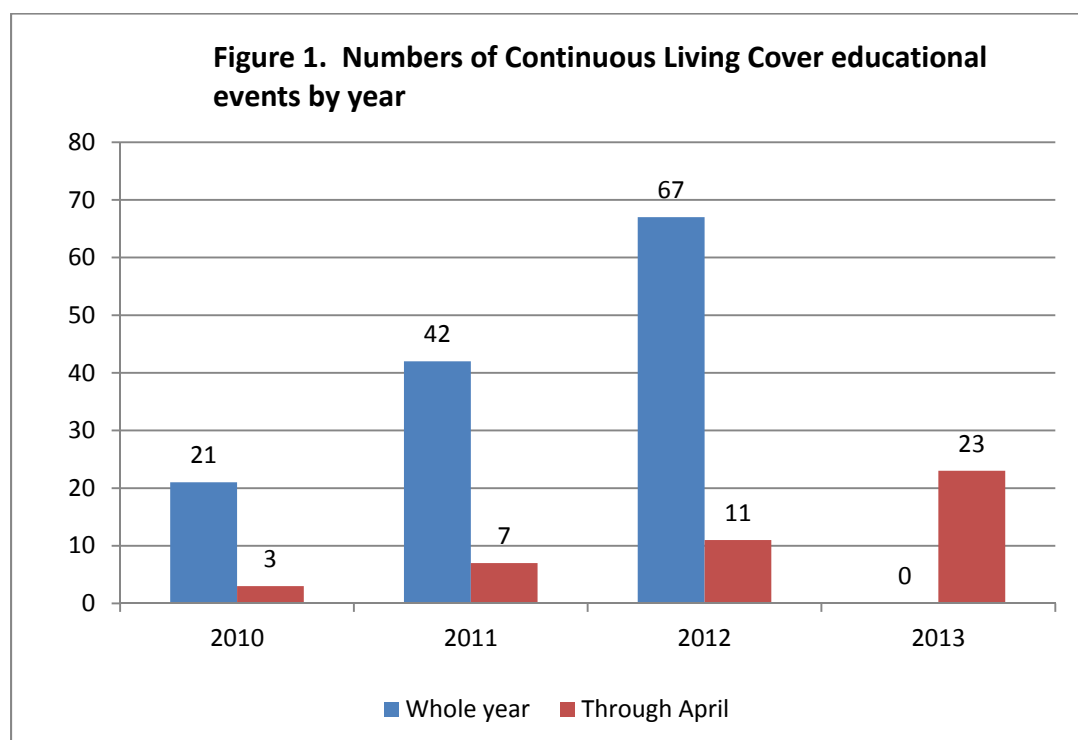


Figure 1 includes all events in the database; mostly from MN and IA but a few also from WI, SD, and IL. Blue columns show whole-year numbers, and red columns show numbers through the month of April. Although spotty calendar sources for 2010 may be partially responsible for low event numbers recorded for 2010, we have good calendar sources for 2012, and 2013 appears to be on track to continue a trend of increasing numbers of events.

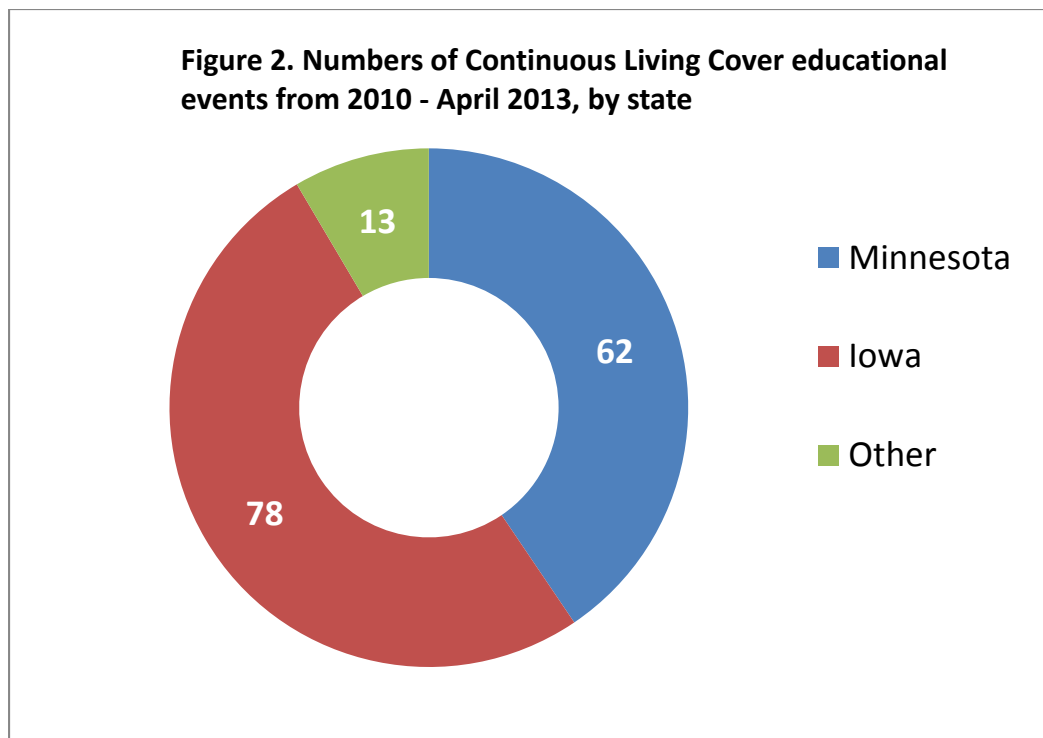


Figure 2 shows that Minnesota and Iowa had similar total numbers of CLC educational events. Ten of the events in states other than Minnesota or Iowa took place in Illinois, and were focused on biomass. A great many perennial forage/grazing events happen in Wisconsin, but information about them is scattered. A near-term goal for GLBW is to find good data sources for those Wisconsin events and add them to the database.

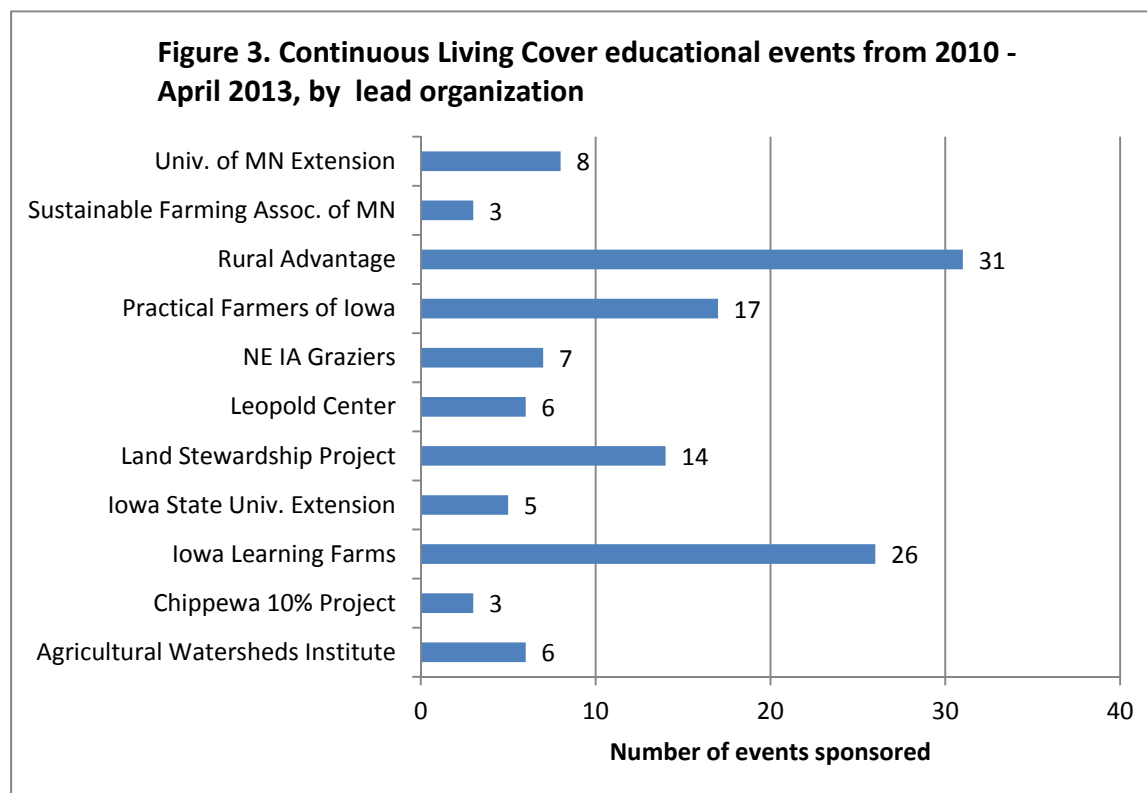


Figure 3 shows number of events led by organizations that had at least three events to their credit. Note that some of these entities are collaborations of several organizations. For instance, Chippewa 10% Project is a collaboration of the Land Stewardship Project and the Chippewa River Watershed Project. Iowa Learning Farms are a collaboration of the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, Iowa State University Extension, Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, Iowa NRCS, and Iowa DNR; and also involve cooperation with Conservation Districts of Iowa, Iowa Farm Bureau and Iowa Water Center.

The Chippewa 10% Project is an example of capacity-building around CLC that is focused on a watershed. The Chippewa 10% collaboration was launched in September of 2010.

Organizations that took the lead for fewer than three events:

Aitkin County Economic Development (1), CropLife Media Group (1), Illinois Stewardship Alliance (1), Iowa State University (1), Iowa Soil and Water Conservation Society (2), Midwest Aronia Association (1), NCR-SARE (2), Southwest Badger RC & D Council (1), Trout Unlimited (1), Univ. of MN (2), Univ. of Wisc. Extension (1), 4-state collaboration of Extension (1).

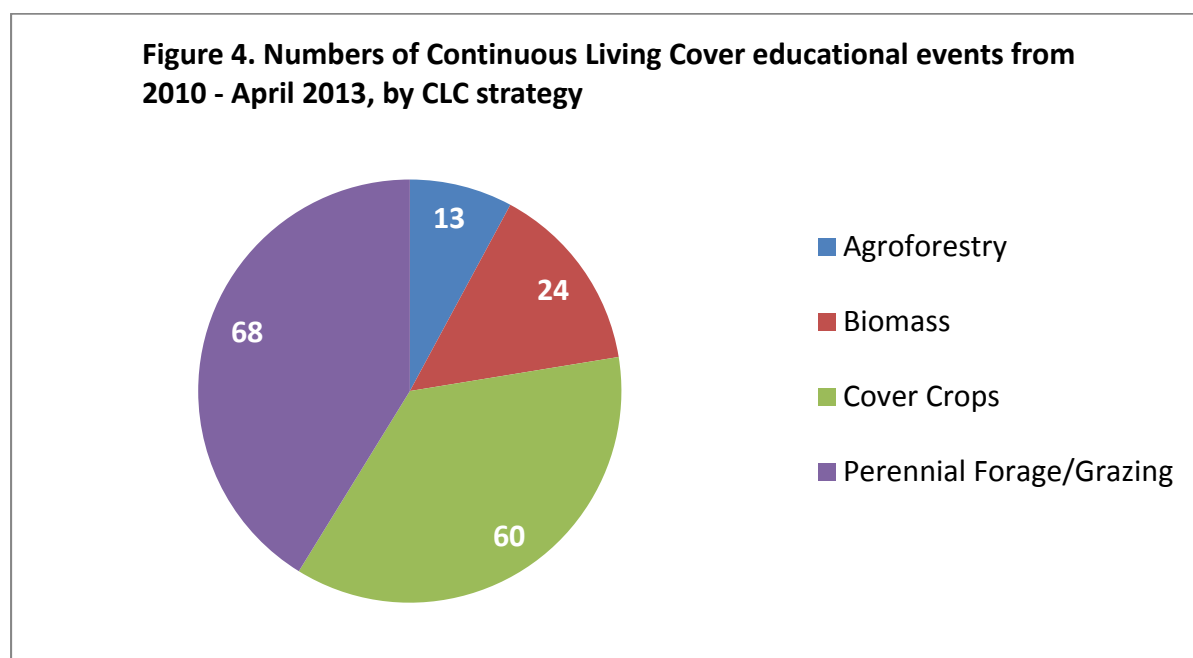
The database includes tracking of 100 non-profit organizations, state and Federal agencies, college and university-based programs, and businesses that collaborated or participated in CLC events primarily in IA; plus a few in WI, SD, and IL; during the time period covered by the database.

Total number of collaborations: 476

Average number of collaborators per CLC event: 3

Level of involvement of organizations ranged from collaboration on one CLC event, up to collaboration on 45 CLC events.

This number and diversity of types of organizations participating indicates there is good potential for fostering stronger and more intentional networks around CLC strategies.



The number of cover crop events in 2012 is of interest because 2012 was a record-setting year for cover crop acreage planted in Iowa<sup>1</sup>. Figure 4 shows that the database contains 60 cover crop events. Twenty of those (one-third of the total cover crop events) took place in Iowa in 2012. Farmer adoption of cover crops was driven partially by drought in the summer of 2012 and partially by a new cost-share program from the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, in addition to funding that was already available to farmers through the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP). Iowa organizations stepped up with field day and workshop offerings to promote the benefits of cover crops in drought situations and encourage farmers to plant them.

Figure 4 appears to over-report the total number of events because some events covered multiple CLC topics. Multiple-topic events are of interest because a goal of GLBW is to encourage the concentration of CLC on the landscape, by use of multiple CLC strategies in the same geographical area. Out of 153 total events in the database, 14 were multi-topic, which is 9% of total events. Twelve of those covered

<sup>1</sup> New state cost share funds help 117 farmers install 4,660 acres of cover crops. 12/19/2012. Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship press release. <http://www.iowaagriculture.gov/press/2012press/press12192012.asp> (accessed 04/29/2013).

two topics, and two events covered three CLC topics. The database can be a helpful resource by showing who among CLC event organizers has experience with multi-topic events.

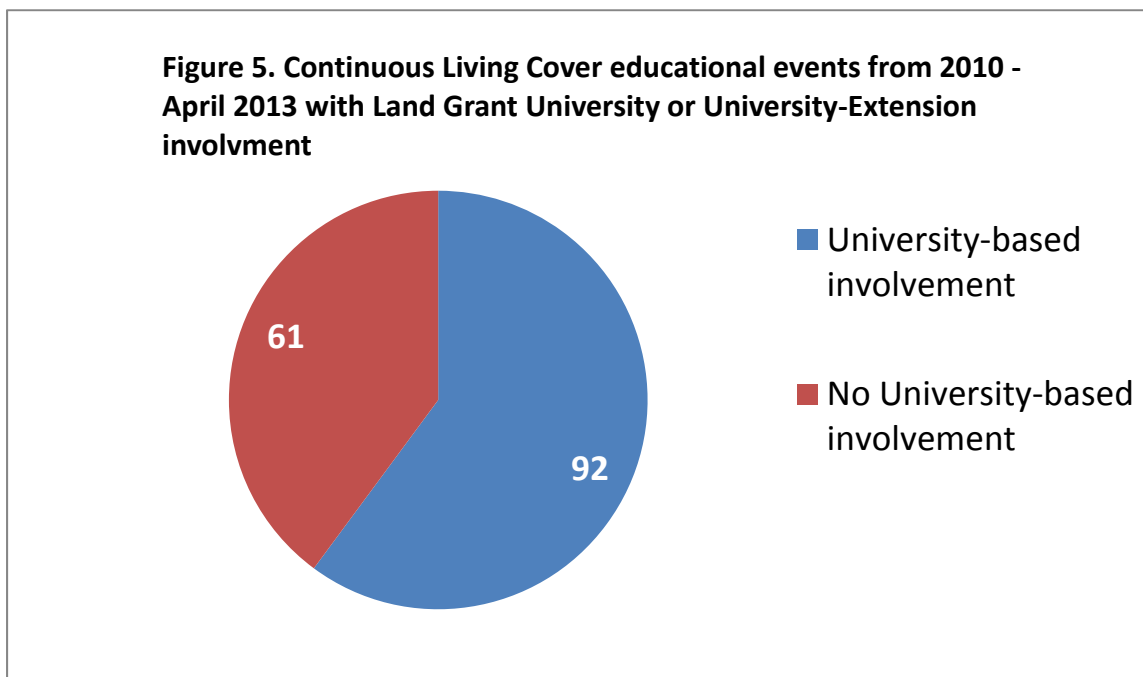


Figure 5 shows that Land Grant University or University-Extension units were involved in 60% of CLC educational events. In many cases several University-based entities were involved in the same field day. For example, a series of “Greenhorn Grazing Workshops” offered in Iowa involved the Iowa Beef Center, the Iowa Learning Farms, the Leopold Center, and other Iowa State University Extension. All four of those entities are associated with Iowa State University. A total of 155 instances of University-based involvement are recorded in the database. In addition, there were 4 instances of involvement of non-Land Grant colleges and Universities: Drake University in Iowa; and M-State Fergus Falls and Winona State University in Minnesota.

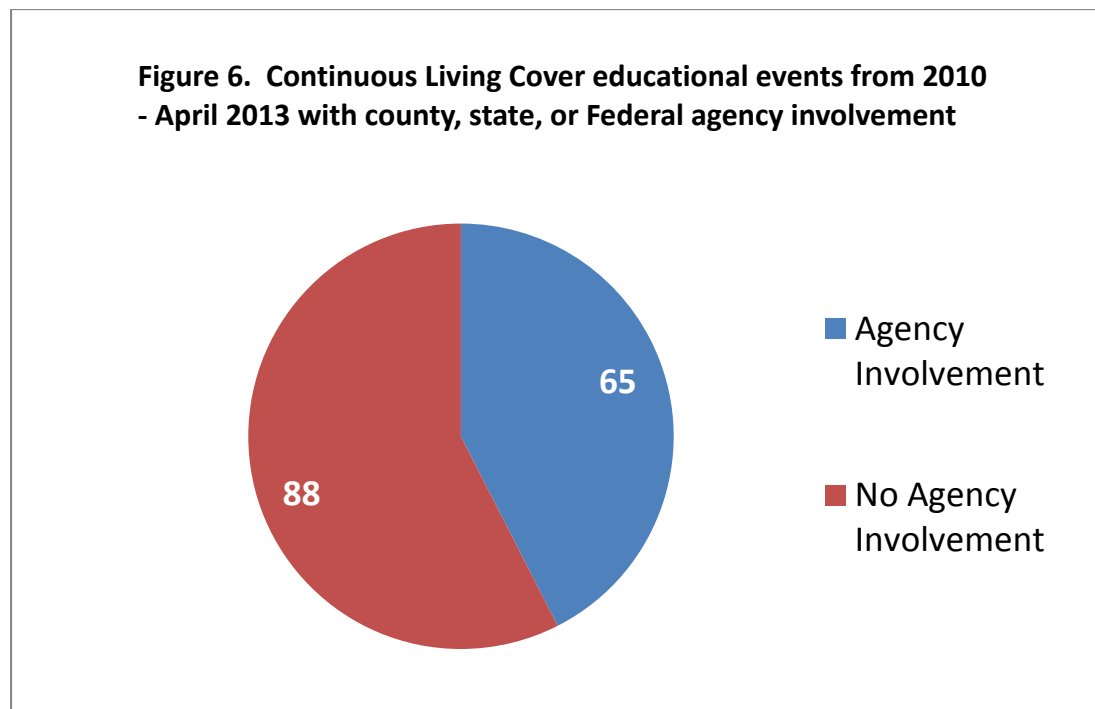


Figure 6 shows that county, state, or Federal agencies were involved in 42% of CLC educational events. Similar to University-based involvement, often several agencies were involved in the same educational events. A total of 102 instances of agency involvement are recorded in the database.



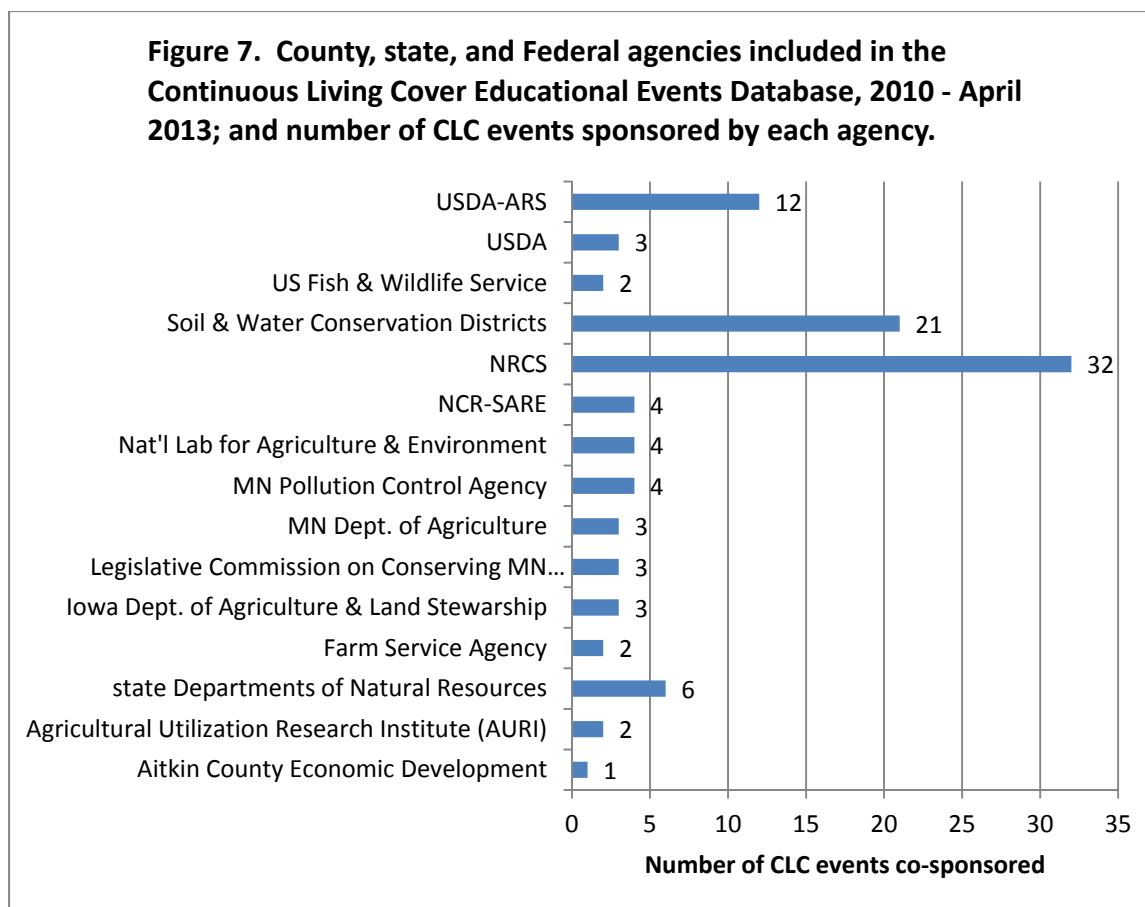


Figure 7 shows that fifteen agencies at the county, state, and Federal levels participated in CLC events at some level. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS) was the most active, with 32 events co-sponsored. The majority of the agencies were involved with four or fewer events. This suggests that there is potential to increase the level of involvement of a number of agencies in CLC efforts.

Conclusions from the data:

1. According to the accessible calendar sources, there has been a steady, linear increase in the number of CLC field days and workshops since 2010.
2. There is potential to expand the number of multiple-topic CLC events offered. Only 14 out of 153 field days were multiple-topic.
3. There is potential to expand University involvement in CLC education. While University-based entities were involved or very involved in 92 (60%) of the events, that still leaves 40% of the events without involvement from a University or University-Extension unit.
4. There is potential to expand county, state, and Federal agency involvement in CLC education. Agencies were involved in 42% of the events, and most agencies with some level of involvement co-sponsored fewer than six events over the 2010 – April 2013 time frame of the database.